



Days of Fear in San Francisco

Drawn from the author's and other's experiences

by Ernst Skarstedt

So happy by the Golden Gate you lay,
O city, when dawned one morn in spring,
With dreams of victories at play
And great visions for your smile to sing.

But, below, the abyss remained, thou bold.
Though warned, its brink you played beside.
T'will take, perhaps, a lot of lives and gold,
When you embrace your greed and pride.

C. G. Norman

Wednesday the 18th of April shall always be regarded as red letter day in San Francisco. The young metropolis on the Pacific coast, proud city of the Argonauts, which could thank the discovery of gold in California at the end of the 1840s for its genesis, and California's magnificent resources and outstanding harbor within the Golden Gate to thank for its rapid growth and blossoming has, on many occasions been ravaged by fire and [125] damaged by earthquakes, but, never before has it been tested by these natural forces combined violence and power. Without any idea of the threatening disaster, that in less than three days would obliterate the result of a half century of toil and labor, the pleasure-seeking part of the population enjoyed themselves with boutiques, theaters, amusement parks, or rambles in the shopping district by the light of electric lights far into the night, as always. The home-bodies had gone to bed in the firm knowledge that in

a few hours they would have to get up again to a new work-day, with the same working hours and breaks, the same pleasures and the same mistakes that had come to be their lot.

Their awakening, however, did not correspond with their expectations. In the early dawn, at a quarter to five, while most were still in deep sleep, the entire city was shaken by a violent earth-quake, so far as is known the strongest ever to beset California. At the time, I, myself lived with my family on Mission St. diagonally across from the new post office, on the ground floor of a wooden building and, thereby escaped being shaken the way that the people who live higher up were. Indeed, it is clear that an earthquake feels worse the higher up one lives. People living on the fifth or sixth floor in some of the city's taller buildings, in many cases, were thrown out of their beds, and heavy furniture were shifted far out of place by the temblors. But, even where I lived the noise of the clattering porcelain and falling objects, as well as the building's jerking, rocking movements that increased in speed and strength with every second would send a cold chill up the back of anyone. Indeed, one did not know at what moment the entire building would come crashing down upon them. The only conscious thought going through my brain was, "Will this never end?" Certainly, I had previously experienced many earthquakes in San Francisco, but they had [126] never lasted more than a second. This one seemed to never want to end. At last the movement and noise settled down. After that, footsteps and running could be heard from the stairs and the street, troubled voices, shouts, sobs, laments, and buzzing.

It had seemed as if the earthquake had lasted 4 or 5 minutes. It actually only lasted 47 seconds, but, it was followed shortly thereafter by several after-shocks, and for weeks and months later there were occasional earthquakes, most of them fairly weak.



The Swedish Lutheran Church and parsonage

As soon as the earthquake ceased I jumped out of bed, dressed quickly, and rushed out onto the street. It was still half-dark, but, it was light enough to see the destruction that had occurred. Several buildings had significant damage, a furniture store a few doors from my residence had been transformed into a pile of rubble, in several places, the trolley tracks had been ripped up, [127] and bent into bows, and the street was cracked, sunk in one place, raised in another. The beautiful marble sidewalk in front of the post office was devastated. The previous night I had seen about ten Chinese working in their faces' sweat in a laundry. Now, it lay leveled to the ground, and its residents were buried by it. A walk through the streets gave reason for a gloomy outlook. Destruction and ruin everywhere. The expensive shop windows in shards on the shattered sidewalks, streets overflowing with heaps of stone, the impressive city hall, the pride of the city that had cost 6 million dollars, hopelessly destroyed. On Valencia Street a three story house sank into the ground for the first two stories, and a huge gap opened in the middle of the street. The great opera house, where Conried's famous theater troupe had performed the previous two evenings to masses of admiring people in glamour and splendor, now lay spread across the street, a dismal heap of ruins, and the company's famous primadonnas and dramatic tenors escaped with their lives by the skin of their teeth from the hotel where they had spent the night.

Among the masses of people who filled the streets in dismal procession I saw much odd behavior, and heart-rending talk.

“I am the only one who got out of the house where I lived alive,” said one. “Just

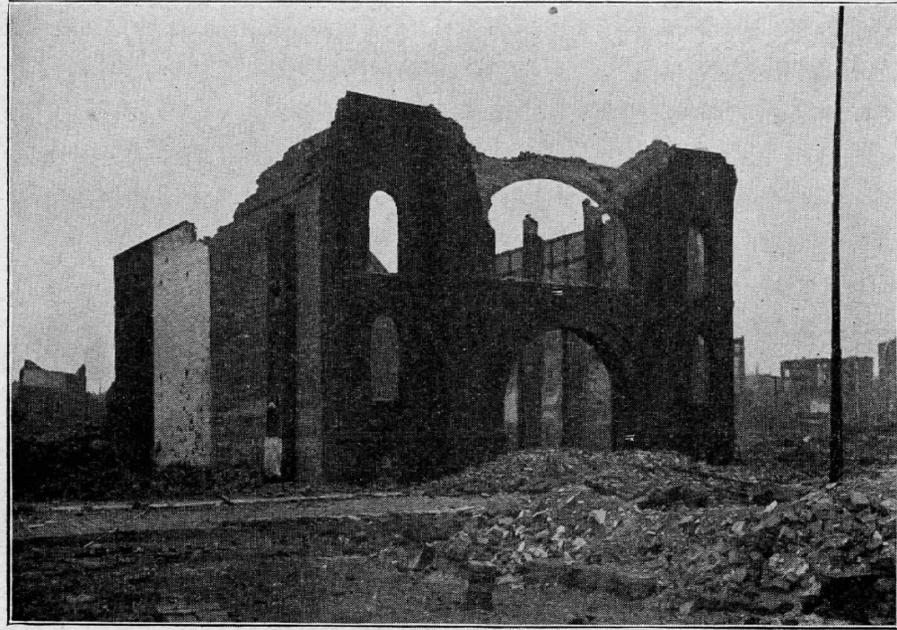
as I got out, the whole building collapsed, and buried everyone in it.”

This was referring to a multi-story residential building in which a hundred people had spent the night. There was talk of some remarkable occurrences. A waiter who had gotten very drunk that afternoon, called a good friend on the telephone early Wednesday morning to ask him to open the restaurant, and serve until he could pull himself together. The friend accepted the assignment, and had just begun to clean and sweep up when a wall crashed down and buried him, the drunken waiter, who rightly should [128] have been there, crawled out of his bed and saved himself. It will never be known how much damage the earthquake caused, as the fire soon erased all traces of its effects. In the early morning, shortly after the earthquake completed its work a fire broke out in a number of places in the city as a result of cracked chimneys, torn-up electric lines, or exploded gas lines. Thick clouds of smoke were layered over the city, and with wonder and fright, we saw the new threatening danger. I said to the man walking next to me, “I wish I could get over to Oakland, the peaceful, beautiful city on the opposite side of San Francisco Bay.”

“What good would that do?” he roared. “Oakland is in flames like San Francisco. Los Angeles, Seattle, Portland, all of the cities on the coast were destroyed by the earthquake, and are ravaged now by fire. Chicago has sunk into Lake Michigan. New York, Boston, and Baltimore are flooded.”

In the nerve-shattered atmosphere that we found ourselves in, it was possible to believe almost anything. I could not even think that the one speaking did not know better than I about what was happening in the world, when no newspapers or mail were being delivered, and all connection with the outside world had been severed. It seemed horrible to think that there had been such a general world-wide destruction that he, and I later found, others purported to be in full force. Just then, I discovered that one of the clouds of smoke came from the tract where I lived. I left the prophet of doom, and ran home. The fire was already so close that one could hear the flames crackle. Just as well, just as is the case at great catastrophes, one hoped to be spared, and hopes for rescue until the end. First, when the police ordered evacuations, everyone hurried to pack up their belongings. Trunks, mattresses, covers, rugs, sewing machines, furniture, yes, even organs and pianos were flung out onto the sidewalks and [129] across the street to where an available open place to then, anxious that the flames were approaching, carry them back, hauled or driven to other places or left behind as prey for the flames. Many, in their haste, seem to have left all of their judgment behind. One saw women who had rescued nothing more than a birdcage, or a dog, men wearing three hats, but no vest or coat. One man ran around barefoot, bare-headed, holding an old frying pan in his hand, as if it were of the greatest value in

the world. The musician Edgren tells of an 80 year old woman who he helped rescue had packed her bag with pots, pans, and kettles until one could hardly lift it, but left all of her clothes and other valuables as a prize for the flames.



The ruins of the Swedish Mission Church

Drayage was in great demand. Many were worthy of the name, but, others mercilessly used the opportunity [130] to profit from disaster. It was common for people to pay 10-15 dollars to get a crate moved a short distance. I, along with some of my neighbors, had the luck to hire a man really cheaply, who moved our things to a distance of twelve miles. Certainly, from there they would have to be moved further on, on the other hand, I did not have much to move. Only a couple of chests and a few small items. However little it was, it still caused worry, and it was not without a certain desired sum that I could, with Marcus Elmlad, shout, "It's easy to move. Of belongings, praise God, I have none."

I had a lot of belongings, but they lay packed away in cases and chests in a storage cellar, where they were later buried under a demolished sky-scraper. A couple hundred books that I had left with a bookbinder had already burned up on Wednesday morning. We found refuge with some good friends who lived a good distance from the fire's first affected area; but, by the following afternoon we both had to draw farther away, and take refuge in Golden Gate Park, where many thousands of people had found places among the bushes, and where we listened with fright to the thunder of explosion reports from the burning city.

You see, the fire was being fought with dynamite. Since the earthquake had destroyed the water mains, so that could it be had for the hoses only in exceptional

cases, such as in the harbor, and in a few other places. In the battle against the fire other methods from the usual had to be used. To blow the buildings into splinters before the fire reached them, and thereby make it more difficult for the fire to flare up in high flames was the battle strategy used here. It was a battle that shall never be forgotten by those who fought it, or by those who witnessed it.

San Francisco is divided from east to west by a broad street, called Market Street, which, until the 18th of April was [131] one of the most beautiful commercial streets in the world, surrounded as it was by stately buildings, full of life and movement, and nights illuminated by means of electrical wires, in a way and extent that few equals, if any, have been found. Another broad street, Van Ness Avenue runs about two and a half miles to the west of that street's eastern end in a northwesterly direction, and a half a mile west of it a third broad street, Dolores Street runs in a southwest direction. The fire had earlier gotten a toehold on both sides of Market Street, and traveled forth with precipitous wildness among the city's largest, most expensive buildings. One skyscraper after another was tumbled by the flames. At the same time, a more dreadful and overwhelming sight has seldom yet been seen, when the publication Call's wonderful 20 story building, one of the most beautiful in America, was assaulted by the fire, whose tongues of flame licked all of the building's hundreds of windows at once. It was sight that cannot be forgotten. It brought tears to many human cheeks.

By Wednesday, it became fairly clear to everyone that the city was totally destroyed, and that the only prospect of halting the fire lay in preventing it from crossing the two above-named streets, Van Ness Avenue, and Dolores Street. All Wednesday night we listened in dismay to the crackling, and crunching from the burning city, and the continuous detonations. It was an extravagantly spectacular view of the two mile wide sea of flames that glowing and crackling rolled on, transforming the most beautiful buildings in a few moments into horrible ruins shedding a light so bright that in the middle of the night one could read ordinary print. On Thursday, the hopeless battle against the fire continued, and that night it would be decided how the enemy could be stopped at Dolores Street. The side of the street that the fire was approaching was lined with new two story houses, half of them owned by one of the city's most prominent Swedes, [132] the pharmacist Hulting, who, the day before, had seen his earthquake-damaged pharmacy go up in smoke. Right across from the previously mentioned row of houses was another row of buildings, of which the two on the end were the Swedish Lutheran Church and its parsonage.

“Now, everything depends on whether the church can be saved,” said the leader of the fire brigade. “It is the key to the whole situation. If it catches fire, the whole part of the city behind it will be lost.”



The location where the Swedish Methodist Church stood

The whole row of houses situated across from the church was leveled with dynamite. When that was done, and flames began to consume the wreckage it still looked threatening for the church, and there were loud shouts to blow it up, too. Pastor Andreen asked the grim "dynamiters" if they could spare the temple. Their leader hesitated. As luck would have it, [133] a pool created by a broken sewer line was discovered nearby. A number of persons volunteered to form a bucket brigade. Some climbed up the steeple and hung blankets on the walls. Water was carried up and poured over the blankets. It was miserable work in the late night, and the poor exhausted, thirsty workers slaked their thirst with the same filthy water that they used to save the temple. They took the best there was to be had, however bad it was. Pastor Andreen's church was the only Swedish one that survived the great fire, and a service was held there on Sunday. Of the beautiful Mission Church, which was made of stone, there was nothing left but a few naked walls. There was only a little of the foundation left of the equally large and beautiful Baptist church, and of the Methodist church there was only ashes and gravel.

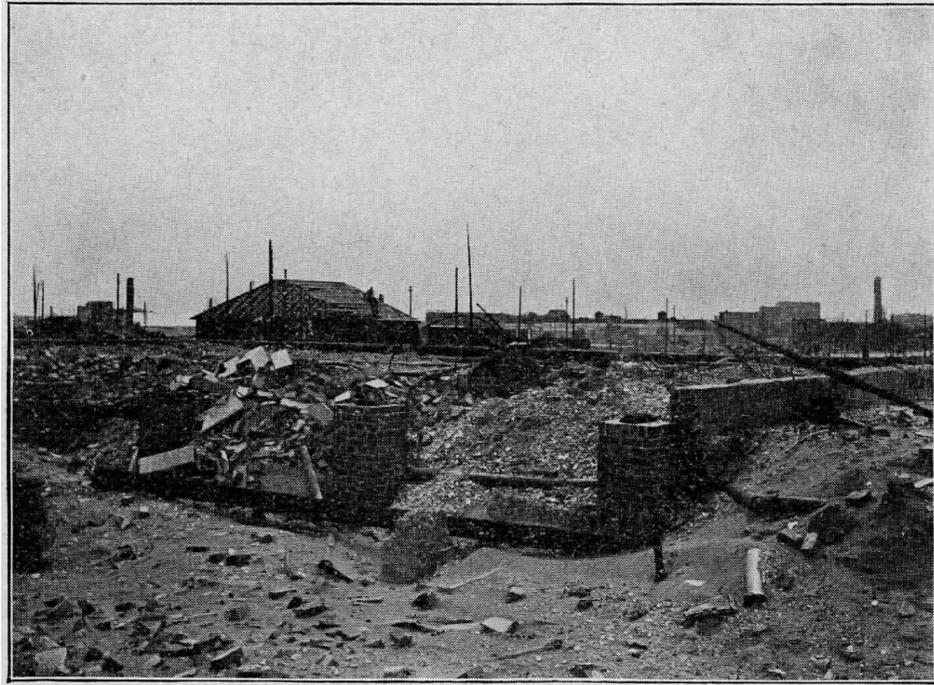
A yet harder-fought battle was waged Friday night along Van Ness Avenue. Horrifying detonations thundered through the night, as the stately, in many cases palatial, buildings along one of the city's finest streets of high-society, the one after the other mercilessly blown to bits. But, thereby, a great part of the city was saved, and the men who accomplished this great work ought to be remembered with gratitude by the residents of the new city that is already being planned as the

ashes are being shoveled. They were only three, but, they were three heroes, Admiral McCall's most trusted cannoneers from the Mare Island Naval Station. Their leader was Captain McBride, the man who set the charges was named Adamson. The three men were sent to rescue the city. They came without any fanfare, and after carrying out their task, they left as unnoticed as they had come.

The fire raged for three days, and destroyed great parts of western America's largest city. On Saturday it still looked like it wanted to pick up speed, but its strength was broken, and with the beginning of a new week all further danger to the rescued part of the city was averted. Approximately three fourths of the city had been leveled. The perimeter of the devastation, which was calculated [134] to encompass 5,000 acres, measured with diverse crooks and bows, at 26 miles. Within that area, before the fire, were nearly all of the city's churches and schools, all of the wholesalers, banks, newspapers, printers, factories, warehouses, millionaires' mansions, science academies with their precious museum, the public library as well as all of the city's other libraries, most of the private book collections and bookshelves, and all of the public buildings except for two – the mint and the post office – which came through with minor damage. Around 250,000 people lived in the burned area, and the losses in the devastated area are estimated at \$300,000,000, of which \$175,000,000 was covered by fire insurance which, however, will never be fully paid, as several of the insurance companies under various pretexts refused to honor their commitments. Approximately one million books, among them many precious and irreplaceable, burned up. How many human lives can never be determined. Between 4- and 500 charred bodies have been identified, but probably just as many died who will never be identified or found. In the register of victims are the following names that indicate Swedish origins: Chas. Anderson, C. A. Anderson, Louis Anderson, Will. Anderson, Ella Burke (Björk?), T. Beckman, H. Lund, E Norman, John Pearson, and A. A. Peterson, C. J. Tomason. Over 100 persons died at the mental institution in San Jose, which was destroyed in the earthquake, including three Swedes, namely, orderly Gustavus Braden, and patients Mrs. Westerland and Mrs. Göhranson who, a dozen years ago, under the name "Laura", was known in the Press as a fairly skillful writer in both verse and prose.

With the fire's first outbreak the city was already in a state of emergency. Many thousands of soldiers came to participate in fighting the fires, maintain order among the terrified residents, and to protect the city from arsonists [135] and thieves who always appear at these types of occasions in troubling numbers. Strict martial law was implemented, and dozens of law-breakers, without trial or investigation, were sent from this world. In some cases young soldiers acted hot-bloodedly in their haste. Yes, even innocent persons, such as those engaged in charity work, were shot down by young hot-heads, mostly cadets. The real

soldiers, as a rule, behaved themselves in an exemplary manner, and conducted themselves well.



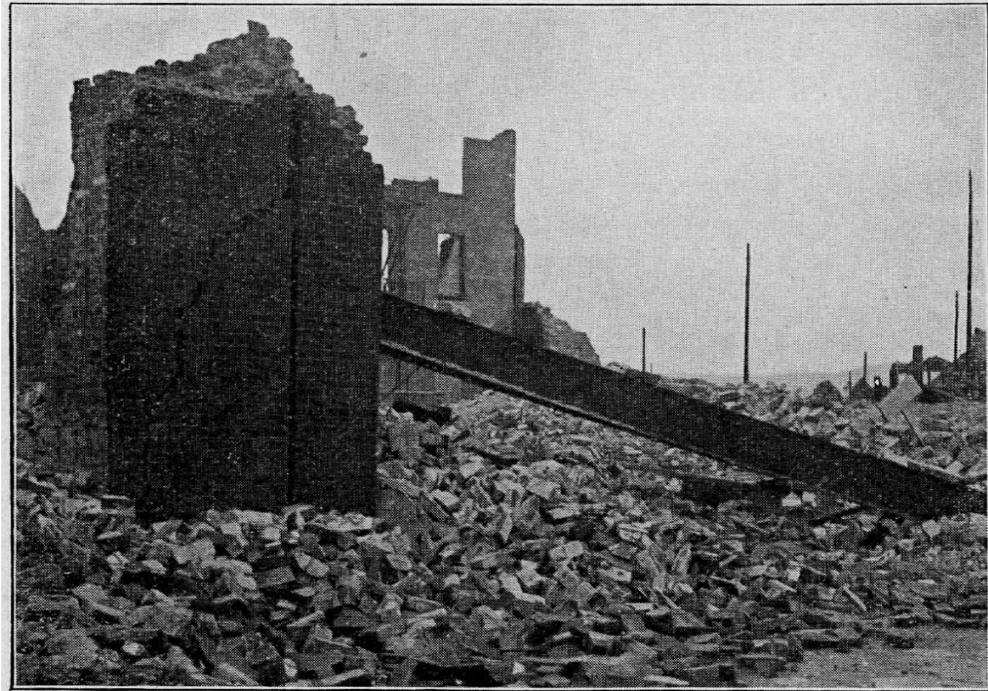
The ruins of the Swedish Baptist Church

Many people probably thought that they were too strict, but, under the circumstances, it was necessary that they should not turn a blind eye to any crime or malicious negligence. Thanks to them, the city was spared from mobs of the worst sort. Such scum who cut the fingers and ears off women to get their rings, jewelry and other such misdeeds, rob corpses, arrange arsonage [136] rake in unreasonable compensation for insignificant services are not worth a better fate than to be summarily shot or hanged. And, such malefactors are many. A driver wanted 30 dollars to let an 80 year old woman ride a half a mile. The old lady only had 20 dollars and offered them to the driver. He just laughed at her and started to drive away, when a soldier who heard the conversation, lifted his rifle and shot the villain. The old woman got a free ride, and the wagon used in service of the city. Through the military's radical measures, perhaps some people had to remain in temporary constraints, but it was necessary. A lot of work must be done. The streets had to be cleared of rubble and debris so that one could travel between the harbor and the intact part of the city. Sick and injured persons, medicine, food, clothes etc had to be transported; aid stations, stalls and other buildings had to be erected quickly. There was no money to pay for all that. The quickest way to reach that goal was to commandeer horses, wagons, and automobiles, and "conscript" people into labor. No one mocked the soldiers. One must obey them or risk being shot. Many comical episodes took place in those days. A young

snob came strutting along in a high hat, pince nez, gloves, walking stick, and new clothes. A soldier caught sight of this comical apparition. "Work!" he ordered, and the snob found himself with several hours of carrying bricks. When he was released, and hurried away in his dirtied clothes from his misfortune, he was pressed into service by another soldier, and once again had to strain his muscles. Some ostentatious women drove by in an automobile to view the ruins. A soldier ordered them out of the car and confiscated it, explaining that he could use it more usefully than they could. The ladies went home on foot. When the Hopkins Institute, containing the most precious art collection on the west coast, was threatened by the fire, a young naval officer conscripted some hobos to carry [137] the paintings out. One of them offered some resistance. But, when the officer directed his firearm at his one eye and assured the man that he would not shoot him down if he cooperated, and when the fire engulfed the building two hours later, the paintings had been carried away and rescued.

It was remarkable to see how quickly and well everything was ordered, how quickly the fire danger was overcome. While the fire was still raging at its worst, Congress and individual persons all over the country donated money and supplies to San Francisco. Trains arrived fully loaded with food, clothing, tents, and other supplies. Within a few days aid stations were erected, some of the more important streets were cleared, so that the trolleys and telegraph lines could be put in order, and the population was seen standing in long lines at the aid stations, receiving food and other necessities. For several weeks over 200,000 people were fed in this way, and many found it to be so convenient, that they seemed to want to continue with it their whole lives through. The harbor captain needed workers, and one day, he offered steady work with \$2 a day wages to 50 big strong men who were standing in line at an aid station, and only three of them cared to listen to him. Many of those in need abused the general charity to a high degree. On occasions such as this one finds how demanding and unashamed, and heartless a great many people are. People in distress knocked each other out of the way, and thought out all sorts of plans to finagle more than their fair share for themselves. One driver who had the assignment of driving necessities from the harbor to various aid stations, had smuggled away two and a half tons of food and goods to a canyon among the hills. A fine lady came to an aid station and asked for a hot bath. As it happened, there was hot water, and she got her hot bath. The next night she came back with the same request. The man said that she would have to do with a cold bath, because there wasn't any hot water. [138] She became unreasonable, saying that she was used to taking a hot bath every day and preferred to be served. A gentleman came to the same aid station and presented a list of the wares he needed for himself and his family. On the list were various pairs of shoes of a particular brand, clothing, and much more. The value of the wares came to hundreds of dollars. It seemed impossible to make him understand that his demands were

unjustified. He had seen in the newspaper that the station had gotten \$50,000 at its disposal, and he wanted his part of it. When he would not see reason, he had to be thrown out.



The ruins of the Swedish Association building, Skandia Hall

There is something more needing attention to bring order and sense among the hundred thousand people who were suddenly cast into abnormal circumstances, and of whom all too many are incorrigible and ruthless. But, Generals Funston and [139] Greely, Mayor Schmitz, and Governor Pardee, whose lot was to make everything right, carried out their assignment in a masterly way. The railroad companies helped, too, in the most considerable way to relieve the situation through giving free travel to all who wanted to leave the city. Railroad tickets for a combined sum of a half million dollars were distributed in that manner, and over 100,000 people left for other places. The city's 20,000 Chinese disappeared, gripped by the panicked terror for the fate that had come to their district, no one knows where. But, as easy as it was to leave the city, it was just as hard to get in. No one was let into San Francisco without a pass. Thereafter, measures were taken to relieve the congestion that otherwise would be the result of the entire population packed together within the limited area where they could stay.

It was only difficult to get something to eat in the very first days. As quickly as possible, a pair of bakeries were put in order, and hundreds of loaves of bread were sold daily for 5 cents each, before the aid stations got into full operation,

While the fire raged it often happened that the soldiers confiscated grocery stores whose owners raised the price of food, and let the public have free access to his wares. Water, on the other hand, was in short supply, and we all suffered from thirst for several days. The damage to the chimney pipes on the houses everywhere caused by the earthquake and the feeble ventilation forbade any flame indoors. All cooking was done in the street on simple improvised stoves. During the first week one could not even light a candle or a lamp indoors. If a soldier discovered light shining from a window, he fired a bullet through the pane, just like that.

During the first days the people seemed a trifle dejected, but, the American spirit of enterprise and humorous [140] view of life never failed them. Hardly had the fire been slaked and the remaining brick walls had been dynamited than the public became as newborn. Future plans were discussed everywhere. Scores of buildings began to grow among the ruins. Comical posters and funny advertisements were plentiful. On the rudest of makeshift hovels, cobbled together with mismatched scraps of wood, pieces of crates, and old ink barrels, etc, one could read names like Palace Hotel, Waldorf-Astoria, and announcements that the owner had lots of money in the bank, or that he served delicious dinners. The whole menu was painted on the walls of various hovels. One firm that had "gotten in" an exterminator against the pests, and, on a pile of bricks that were the only remains of its business put up a sign with a rhyming advertisement that, in translation [and re-translation], ran something like this:

Our loss of roaches is surely so.
Mice, bedbugs and ants; where have they gone?
But, we'll rebuild this town, you know
And they'll rush back, then, every one.

This was followed by the firm's name and temporary address in the unburned district.



The ruins of the building where "Vestkusten" had its offices.

Despite the soldiers' vigilance, many succeeded in picking out fire-damaged articles from the ruins such as vases, cups, spoons, among others, and offered them as mementoes and curiosities from the firestorm at prices varying between a few cents and a dollar. Shops were put together from crates, boards, and sawhorses, and whatever else was at hand. Strangely enough, the numbers of merchants and wares increased rapidly, and the latter seemed less and less fire damaged. The inventive businessmen were manufacturing their own products. It was said that they bought cups and pots in Oakland or Sacramento, and burned them in the evenings in their own frying pans. When one saw the rows of innocent [141] looking individuals standing at the shopping counters and buying such curiosities, it is impossible to avoid thinking of the American expression that says: There's a fool born every minute. Dr. Eiler of Sacramento gave a report on how one might obtain mementoes from the burned out district. He went to San Francisco expressly to look for such. In his ramble among the ruins he discovered a beautiful urn, multicolored by the fire. But, as a big policeman also seemed to have discovered it, the doctor dared not take it. Finally, after waiting a long time, he said to the policeman, "If I were in your shoes, I would take possession of that urn."

"Yes, certainly," answered the policeman, "But, if you cast your gaze a little to the right, you will discover a soldier, who also has [142] his eye on the urn. If I take it, he will shoot me. If he takes it, I will shoot him. And, if you touch it, both the soldier and I will make it hot between your ears."

"That I refrained from attempting to collect relics under such complicated and dangerous conditions, and instead quickly hustled myself back home hardly needs

to be added,” the doctor concluded.

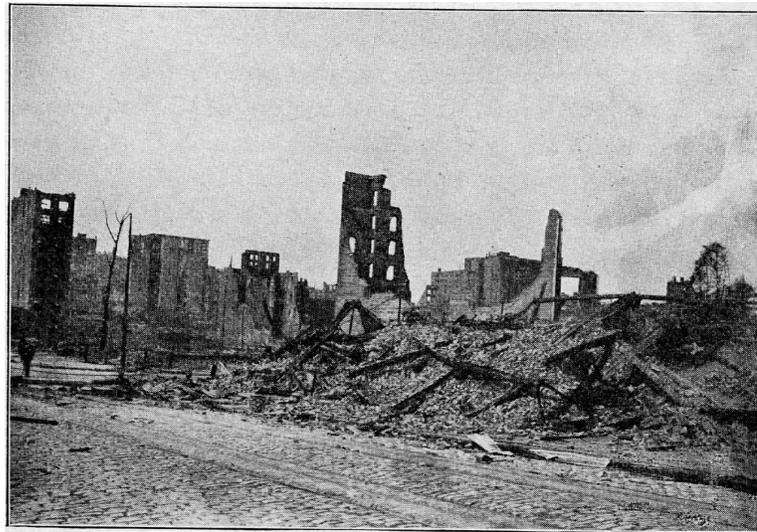
The amount of money that was donated to the needy in San Francisco is counted in the millions, and although there was evidently a lot of waste and favoritism in the administration of the funds, there has been hardly any sense of complaint from the donors. The American people's generosity is magnificent when real need calls for its help. The only really ugly feature of this picture is the behavior of the telegraph companies. However the telegraph lines were destroyed, they accepted hundreds of thousands of telegrams from relatives and friends to the victims in San Francisco, and let them pay the prevailing rate of tax, and sent the telegrams – by mail, like an ordinary letter. The company is said that in that way they larcenously and unjustly misappropriated a million dollars. But, so far as is known, they donated not a single cent to the aid fund. One newspaper rightly worked for the government to withdraw the right for these companies (Western Union was one of them) to do business in America. How differently did the Post Office behave! During those days when it was difficult to obtain stamps, paper, or envelopes in San Francisco, the post office accepted letters written on almost any scrap of paper, and delivered them without envelope or stamp to domestic and foreign destinations. The postmen worked under great difficulty. For a long time it was impossible to deliver any mail. All of the people had changed their addresses, and most streets were impassible. Such a great amount of postal items piled up in the post office, that it [143] could not handle it all. For several weeks we lived without news from the outside world. The San Francisco newspapers, which lost their presses and everything else, were published in Oakland in perfect condition, and like the Oakland newspapers, contained nothing but news of San Francisco and Oakland. It felt really odd when we eventually received letters and newspapers. No newsletters were distributed in San Francisco for many weeks.

One thing that, to a great degree, contributed to the maintenance of order was the ban on intoxicating beverages. For several months there were no bars in the city. A ”coffee lady” who tried to generate a clientele through serving so-called ”Irish coffee” certainly achieved her goal quickly enough, but, was also reported, and had to close business. Some old sots who had been accustomed to get their daily ”quantum satis” went mad from their enforced sobriety. Although most of them should have recovered, again. Those persons who lost their minds as a result of grief or mortification over the losses they suffered were few. According to one report, only around two dozen people went insane, and the majority of them was constituted of the aforementioned alcoholics.

As soon as the fires were quenched some philanthropists among the Swedes laid plans to acquire help for their distressed countrymen, so, the Swedish Aid Committee was empanelled with Pastor Ph. Andreen as chairman, and his brother,

Carl Andreen as treasurer. Dr. C. M. Esbjörn, who immediately upon getting news of the city's catastrophe, hastened 225 miles from his home and parsonage to San Francisco, and after obtaining an entry pass from the governor, made his way to San Francisco – probably the first Swede to enter the city after the earthquake – and, at the request of the committee, authored the the call for support that was later good-heartedly disseminated by all of the Swedish-American press. That appeal brought [144] the desired effect, and significant sums were sent to the committee, which were administered with the greatest discrimination and conscientiousness, and distributed among the countrymen. Although many of the Swedes living in San Francisco lived in areas of the city that had gone untouched, and avoided substantial loss, there were many others who were affected much harder, among them were more than a few widows and orphaned children, and even persons who, because of their in-born shyness, perhaps many times missed out on their just portion of the general supplies. For such persons a special *Swedish Aid* committee, to which they could appeal for their hardship without fear of being crowded out by people of other nationalities must have had a great, special significance.

Nearly all Swedish businessmen suffered significant losses. The extent forbids their calculation.



The pile of rubble under which Mr. Ernst Skarstedt's book collection lies buried.

[145] Fortunately, however, most of them were in such good circumstances, and felt secure in their fire insurance, as well, that none of them became impoverished, but, on the contrary, they were able to resume operation within a short time. It was worse for the working men and laborers who depended on daily work to maintain themselves and their families, and had no savings to fall back upon. Through the excellent and well-paid employment opportunities, that would later be available

with the city's reconstruction, even they would have good prospects of getting on their feet, again. The Swedish associations experienced a great loss when their meeting locale, Skandia Hall, whose expensive furnishing was paid for and owned by them was laid in ashes. Three and a half months later, one of them, the Swedish Society, saw itself in a position to purchase land for the construction of a new meeting house. At the outset of the catastrophe all of the banks in the city were flourishing, and, although it took a couple of months before they dared to open their over-heated cash vaults, and manage to get their affairs in order so that they could begin to honor withdrawals, no depositors lost any of their funds. Through agreements with the U. S. Mint, which had approximately 30 million dollars on hand, many depositors obtained small withdrawals from it until the banks could be reopened. Additionally, many Swedes were assisted by loans and gifts from relatives in other places. Thus, I have many memorable friends to thank for such assistance, and even long after I left San Francisco, I received gifts of large sums of money from a Swedish newspaperman in Chicago, who, in that way, showed his benevolence and liberality toward the Vestkusten's San Francisco distributor, while maintaining secret the benefactor's name.

One of the countrymen who endured the most harrowing experiences was Dr. Fr. Westberg. A few months back, he lay sick and helpless. The house, where he had an apartment on the second floor, was thrown a long way to the side by the earthquake [146], and fell with a crash down to its foundations. The floor and the wall separated. The gas lines cracked apart. The doctor thought that he was lost, unable as he was to save himself. The gas fumes began to suffocate him. Still, he was rescued, and carried to a safe place, and later, by wagon, steam ferry, and railcar to his country place in Mill Valley. He had had a lamp burning in his room every night for months. For the first time, by sheer coincidence, the nurse, took the lamp away that night. That was his salvation, as otherwise there would have been a gas explosion. When one of the doctor's friends came to the place a couple of days later, and saw the destruction, he happened to encounter a Chinaman who lived in the tract, passing by. The doctor's friend called to him, and asked him where the doctor had gone. The Chinaman, who knew nothing about it, but still wanted to help with some information cast a look at the badly damaged house, and answered with something of resigned despair in his voice, "Doctor gone! All smashed up!"

Here, as it is everywhere, the comical is blended with sorrowful, the ridiculous blended with tears. There is so much that is gripping and serious, but also much of the opposite kind, and when, in the course of world events, it was determined that such a terrible scourge should befall a civilized society, it has its peculiar satisfaction of having been part of that experience; to have adjusted to martial law's strict enforcement; live on water rationing, cook in the park or in the street,

anxiously watch the little man be rescued, see rich and poor united in common effort and uncomfortable lodgings, the thirsty and hungry together in faithful unity received gifts of charity, witnessed selfishness and sacrifices of the noblest kind, fed in public kitchens in hastily banged-together barracks, humiliation by pompous cadet-punks, but also saw tests of conscience and [146] judgment in the exercise of trying duty and, above all, experienced such tests of generosity and munificence displayed by the government, the community, social organizations and individuals.

